THROUGH SOVIET EYES

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PERESTROIKA

ПЕРЕСТРОЙКА

"... The thorniest issue have to be discussed with due respect for one another. Even the most extreme viewpoint contains something valuable and rational, for the person who upholds it honestly and who cares for the common cause, in his own way reflects some real aspects of life."

Mikhail Gorbachev

PERESTROIKA

In this and the subsequent issue of THROUGH SOVIET EYES the editors have decided to feature extensive excerpts from Mikhail Gorbachev's PERESTROIKA: New Thinking for Our Country and the World, Harper & Row, New York, 1987, 255pp. In a year of remarkable events, this book, which at this writing is on THE NEW YORK TIMES Best Sellers List (Non-Fiction) for the twelfth consecutive week, has a special place. The purpose of the book, writes Mr. Gorbachev, "is to talk without intermediaries to the citizens of the whole world about things that, without exception, concern us all."

Through "perestroika" Soviet society has embarked on a vast long term process of revolutionary improvement of the quality of life. The change encompasses all facets of society including culture, politics and economics, and effects foreign as well as domestic policies. It has already produced the profound new insights of Soviet foreign policy, which were so crucial to the recently signed INF agreement. The details of this shift are described by Gorbachev in the second half of his book and will appear in the next issue. In this issue, we have chosen to focus on [1] the conditions which made it apparent to the Soviets that this process was necessary, and [2] the new culture of democracy and openness ("glasnost") which is necessary for the new policies to emerge.

In addition to the excerpts, the reader will find in this issue examples from the Soviet press of reactions of Soviet citizens to "perestoika".

PERESTROKA, like THROUGH SOVIET EYES, is an invitation to dialogue. We hope that the following excerpts will stir you to obtain the book, read it, and begin discussing it with friends, neighbors and colleagues. And, of course, we hope you will send your reactions to us, so that we can, in future issues, share your thoughts with other readers.

The Editors
February, 1988

PERESTROIKA

We must meet and discuss. We must tackle problems in a spirit of cooperation rather than animosity. I well realize that not everyone will agree with me. As a matter of fact, neither will I agree with everything others say on various issues. This makes dialogue all the more important. And this book is my contribution to it.

... Perestroika is a Revolution ...

Perestroika is a word with many meanings. But if we are to choose from its many possible synonyms the key one which expresses its essence most accurately, then we can say thus: perestroika is a revolution. A decisive acceleration of the socio-economic and cultural development of Soviet society which involves radical changes on the way to a qualitatively new state is undoubtedly a revolutionary task.

"Never in history," wrote Lenin, "has there been a revolution in which it was possible to lay down one's arms and rest on one's laurels after the victory." Why then should not socialism, called upon to carry out even more profound socio-political and cultural changes in society's development than capitalism, go through several revolutionary stages in order to reveal its full potential and finally crystalize as a radically new formation? Lenin repeated the following thought more than once: socialism would consist of many attempts. Each attempt would in a certain sense be one-sided, each would have its own specifics. And this applies to all countries.

... Perestroika -- An Urgent Necessity ...

At some stage -- this became particularly clear in the latter half of the seventies -- something happened that was at first sight inexplicable. The country began to lose momentum. Economic failures became more frequent. Difficulties began to accumulate and deteriorate, and unresolved problems to multiply. Elements of what we call stagnation and other phenomena alien to socialism began to appear in the life of society. A kind of "braking mechanism" affecting social and economic development formed. And all this happened at a time when scientific and technological revolution opened up new prospects for economic and social progress.

On the ideological plane as well, ... [s]cientific, theoretical and other discussions, which are indispensable for the development of thought and for creative endeavor, were emasculated. Similar negative tendencies also affected culture, the arts, and journalism, as well as the teaching process and medicine, where mediocrity, formalism and loud eulogizing surfaced, too.

The presentation of a "problem-free" reality backfired: a breach had formed between word and deed, which bred public passivity and disbelief in the slogans being proclaimed. It was only natural that this situation resulted in a credibility gap: everything that was proclaimed from the rostrums and printed in newspapers and textbooks was put in question. Decay began in public morals; the great feeling of solidarity with each other that was forged during the heroic times of the Revolution, the first five-year plans, the Great Patriotic War and postwar rehabilitation was weakening; alcoholism, drug addiction and crime were growing; and the penetration of the stereotypes of mass culture alien to us, which bred vulgarity and low tastes and brought about ideological barrenness increased.

The need for change was brewing not only in the material sphere of life, but also in public consciousness. People who had practical experience, a sense of justice and commitment to the ideals of Bolshevism criticized the established practice of doing things and noted with anxiety the symptoms of moral degradation and erosion of revolutionary ideals and socialist values.

Workers, farmers and intellectuals, Party functionaries centrally and locally, came to ponder the situation in the country. There was a growing awareness that things could not go on like this much longer. Perplexity and indignation welled up that the great values born of the October Revolution and the heroic struggle for socialism were being trampled underfoot.

All honest people saw with bitterness that people were losing interest in social affairs, that labor no longer had its respectable status, that people, especially the young, were after profit at all cost. Our people have always had an intrinsic ability to discern the gap between word and deed. No wonder Russian folk tales are full of mockery aimed against people who like pomp and trappings; and literature, which has always played a great role in our country's spiritual life, is merciless to every manifestation of injustice and abuse of power.

Turning to Lenin, an Ideological Source of Perestroika .

Turning to Lenin has greatly stimulated the Party and society in their search to find explanations and answers to the questions that have arisen. Lenin's works in the last years of his life have drawn particular attention. I shall adduce my own experience to corroborate this point. In my report of 22 April 1983, at a gala session dedicated to the 113th anniversary of Lenin's birth, I referred to Lenin's tenets on the need for taking into account the requirements of objective economic laws, on planning and cost accounting, and intelligent use of commodity-money relations and material and moral incentives. The audience enthusiastically supported this reference to Lenin's ideas. I felt, once again, that my reflections coincided with the sentiments of my fellow Party members and the many people who were seriously concerned about our problems and sincerely wanted to rectify matters. Indeed, many of my fellow Party members felt an urgent need for the renewal of society, for changes. However, I should say that I also sensed that not everybody liked the report, but felt that it was not as optimistic as the time required.

Today we have a better understanding of Lenin's last works, which were in essence his political bequest, and we more clearly understand why these works appeared. Gravely ill, Lenin was deeply concerned for the future of socialism. He perceived the lurking dangers for the new system. We, too, must understand this concern. He saw that socialism was encountering enormous problems and that it had to contend with a great deal of what the bourgeois revolution had failed to accomplish. Hence the utilization of methods which did not seem to be intrinsic to socialism itself or, at least, diverged in some respects from generally accepted classical notions of socialist development.

It is exactly because we place emphasis on the development of socialist democracy that we pay so much attention to the intellectual sphere, public consciousness and an active social policy. Thereby we want to invigorate the human factor.

In the West, Lenin is often portrayed as an advocate of authoritarian methods of administration. This is a sign of total ignorance of Lenin's ideas and, not infrequently, of their deliberate distortion. In effect, according to Lenin, socialism and democracy are indivisible. By gaining democratic freedoms the working masses come to power. It is only in conditions of expanding democracy that they can consolidate and realize that power. There is another remarkably true idea of Lenin's: the broader the scope of the work and the deeper the reform, the greater the need to increase the interest in it and convince millions and millions

of people of its necessity. This means that if we have set out for a radical and all-round restructuring, we must also unfold the entire potential of democracy.

... Lessons of History ...

And it's hard to imagine that, as we marched into an unknown future, completing ambitious tasks within a short period of time, we could have avoided setbacks, that we could have had it all as smooth as the sidewalk of Nevsky Prospekt. Take, for example, industrialization. In what conditions did we accomplish it? The Civil War and intervention by fourteen foreign powers had left the country completely devasted. There was an economic blockade and a "cordon sanitaire." No accumulations, no colonies; on the contrary, it was essential to use the money available for improving the national hinterlands that had been oppressed under tsarism. In order to save the revolutionary gains, we had to build -- and quickly -- a national industrial base with our internal resources, holding down consumption and reducing it to a minimum. The material burden of that new construction fell on the people, of whom the peasants formed the bulk.

Yes, we also had a rough time, now and again very rough indeed, after victory in the war. I recall my railway trips from southern Russia to Moscow to study in the late forties. I saw with my own eyes the ruined Stalingrad, Rostov, Kharkov, Orel, Kursk and Voronezh. And how many such ruined cities there were: Leningrad, Kiev, Minsk, Odessa, Sevastopol, Smolensk, Briansk, Novgorod ... Everything lay in ruins: hundreds and thousands of cities, towns and villages, factories and mills. Our most valuable monuments of culture were plundered or destroyed -- picture galleries and palaces, libraries and cathedrals.

And we cannot but mention one more aspect of the matter which is frequently ignored or hushed up in the West, but without which it is simply impossible to understand us, the Soviet people; along with the economic and social achievements, there was also a new life, there was the enthusiasm of the builders of a new world, an inspiration from things new and unusual, a keen feeling of pride that we alone, unassisted and not for the first time, were raising the country on our shoulders. People thirsted for knowledge and culture and mastered them. They rejoiced at life, reared their children, and did their day-to-day chores. All this we did in an entirely new atmosphere which differed greatly from what had been before the Revolution, in an atmosphere

of ease, equality and immense opportunities for the working people. We know very well what we received from socialism. In short, people lived and worked creatively at all stages of the peaceful development of our country. Letters which I receive from my compatriots say proudly: sure, we were poorer than others, but our life was more full-blooded and interesting.

Fourteen out of fifteen citizens living in the USSR today were born after the Revolution. And yet we are still being urged to give up socialism. Why should the Soviet people, who have grown and gained in strength under socialism, abandon that system? We will spare no effort to develop and strengthen socialism. I think that a minimum of the new system's potential has been tapped so far.

... Perestroika Gains Momentum ...

There is also the problem of sluggishness, of inertia. The practice of waiting for instructions from above on every matter, of relying on top-level decisions, has not yet been done away with. Not that this is surprising, for this is the way it used to be from workshops to ministries, and it is still having its effect today, even in the upper echelons of administration. The point is that people grew unaccustomed to thinking and acting in a responsible and independent way. Herein lies another big problem.

The main task is to get the whole of society involved in the process of restructuring. Socialism in our society is developing on its own basis. We are not suggesting that perestroika should be carried out with a different people, party, science, literature, and so on. This is not so. We are carrying it out together, through a nationwide effort. The entire intellectual potential must be brought into play. I can see from my own experience that all of us are changing in the course of perestroika. It would be unfair to deny someone the right to experience their own perestroika, to act differently today from how he did yesterday, to proceed today from a realization of the situation and the goals which have been put forward by our time.

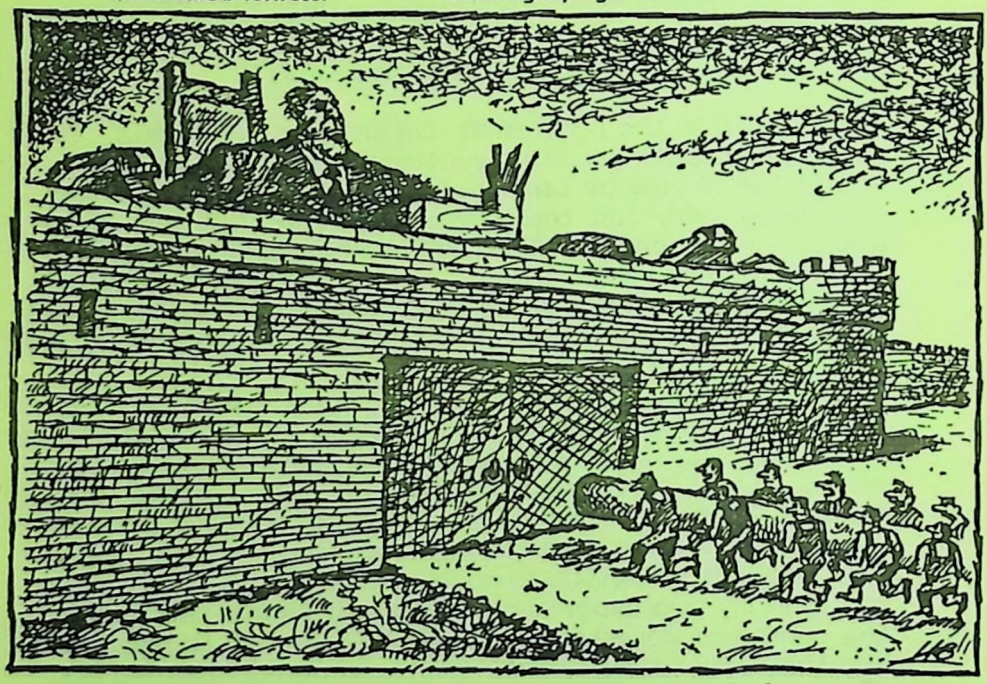
... We Have No Ready-Made Formulas ...

Politics is the art of the possible. Beyond the limits of the possible begins adventurism. It is for this reason that we appraise our possibilities carefully and soberly and map out our tasks taking this into consideration. Taught by bitter experience, we do not run ahead of ourselves on our

chosen path, but take account of the evident realities of our country.

The greatest difficulty in our restructuring effort lies in our thinking, which has been molded over the past years. Everyone, from General Secretary to worker, has to alter this thinking. And this is understandable, for many of us were formed as individuals and lived in conditions when the old order existed. We have to overcome our own conservatism. Most of us adhere to correct political and ideological principles. But there is a substantial distance between a correct stand and its realization.

A doomed fortress. Drawing by Igor Smirnov



Reprinted from NEW TIMES

... More Light to Glasnost! ...

Truth is the main thing. Lenin said: More light! Let the Party know everything! As never before, we need no dark corners where mold can reappear and where everything against which we have started a resolute struggle could start accumulating. That's why there must be more light.

Things will not start changing, however, if the political course is not pursued in a way understandable to the mass-

es. The people should know life with all its contradictions and complexities. Working people must have complete and truthful information on achievements and impediments, on what stands in the way of progress and thwarts it.

Our socialist society, which has resolutely embarked on the road of democratic renewal, has a vital stake in active participation by every citizen -- every worker, every collective farmer, every scientist and every professional -- in both the discussion of our plans and their implementation. And the mass media are playing and will continue to play a tremendous role in this. Naturally, they are not the only channel for expressing the people's will, for reflecting their views and moods. But they are the most representative and massive rostrum of glasnost. The Party wants every citizen to voice his opinion confidently from that rostrum; the voice of citizens should not only make known the discussions that are taking place in the country but also be a guarantor of democratic control over the correctness of decisions and their conformity with the interests and requirements of the masses and, at the next stage, over the fulfillment of the decisions.

The current democratization process is reflected not only in publications, it is increasingly influencing the activities of the mass media. Gradually, as though thawing, our newspapers, magazines, radio and television are uncovering and handling new topics. One of the signs of the general revitalization is that our press is increasingly preferring dialogue to monologue. Formal reports are giving way to interviews, conversations, "round-table" discussions, and discussions about letters from readers. True, there is a tendency sometimes to limit the number of contributing writers to three or five people. This is nothing but professional arrogance. It is much more useful to diversify the authorship so that all citizens have a say, so that socialist pluralism, as it were, is represented in each publication in its entirety. It is certainly a good thing when a professional writer defines his position. It is much more interesting, however, to read conversations and interviews with workers, secretaries of district Party committees, chairmen of collective farms, scientists and cultural personalities. They are the carriers of live ideas. Or take the letters -- what wonderful documents they are! They are truely moving.

Democracy is introducing substantial corrections into the relationships between those who criticize and those who are criticized. These should be relations of partnership built on mutual interest. A dialogue is more appropriate in such instances, while all sorts of condescending lecturing and didactics and especially courtroom tones are absolutely inadmissible. And the latter can be found even in articles written by good and respected authors. No one has the right to a final judgement.

... Perestroika and the Intelligentsia ...

Emotional outbursts are an inevitable part of any complicated endeavor. This has always been the case in revolutionary times. Today it is as if we are going through a school of democracy again. We are learning. We still lack political culture. We do not even have the patience to hear our friends. All this is sure to pass. We will master this science, too. The thorniest issues have to be discussed with due respect for one another. Even the most extreme viewpoint contains something valuable and rational, for the person who upholds it honestly and who cares for the common cause in his own way reflects some real aspects of life. For us this is not an antagonistic, class struggle; it is a quest, a debate on how we can really get going with the restructuring effort and make our progress solid and irreversible. So I don't see any drama in polemics, in comparing viewpoints. This is normal.

The first thing that has to be ensured is an atmosphere that encourages the restructuring effort and renders the individual socially active and responsible. This is the atmosphere of openness, of discussing all matters, even the most difficult, with the people, so as to resolve them all together. To achieve this we need real public involvement in administration. This is why we say that democratization is the cornerstone of the restructuring effort. Such forms as the new management mechanism, election of managers, and setting up of work-collective councils at the work team, factory shop and enterprise level have been legitimately introduced. It is evident from the example of collectives of contractural and family-run farms how our people have missed the proprietary role. They wat not only to earn more, which is entirely understandable; they want to do it honestly. They want to earn, not scrounge from the state. This desire is totally in a socialist spirit, so there should be no restrictions -- whatever a person earns he should receive. At the same time, we should not allow a person to receive what he has not earned.

... Observance of Law .

Activity and initiative developing within the framework of law should be given every support and encouragement. We have lost too much trying to list all rights of enterprises in different instructions. In fact, it was implied that any undertaking which went beyond these instructions should have been treated as unacceptable. Meanwhile, experience has demonstrated that what we need is not a total legislative regulation of diversified phenomena of social life, but sound rationality, and constant fostering of and support for the worker, workforce, and all forms of popular initiative. Let's strictly observe the principle: everything which is not prohibited by law is allowed.

ABOUT PERESTROIKA

(From letters to the 'Pravda' newspaper)

Reprinted from MOSCOW NEWS

MORE FRANKNESS!

We approve of our Party's policy. We read in the central press, see on TV and hear over the radio a lot of information concerning perestroika and glasnost in our country. All that is well. The plant we work at is also undergoing perestroika – for example, state quality control has been introduced there.

Why do we write the letter then? We want to know what precisely is done in our city and region to improve people's lives. What has taken a turn for the worse, what for the better? We, residents of Kharkov, are treated badly in shops, everyday services shops, at housing organizations.

The local press publishes all sorts of resolutions issued by the City and Regional Party Committees, still the situation doesn't change, as we see it. Why does the First Secretary of the Regional Party Committee choose not to meet us people? We have never seen him and are more familiar with Mikhail Gorbachev.

A. GAVRILOV, N. ZAITSEV, S. SAVCHENKO – workers at the Kharkov Tractor Works

Kharkov

REHEARSING A DEMONSTRATION

I would like to share my mind on a certain issue which I feel a grave concern about. It is the practice of holding socio-political and business meetings. We shall be frank and admit that they are overorganized and ostentatious.

Take, for example, festive demonstrations. More than once I have had to handle the task of organizing a festive group from our Institute's personnel. Here is a list of our "equipment": flowers – 100, emblems – 25, flags – 70, banners – 25, and a set of flags of the constituent Republics.

Let me also mention the rehearsals for which students are recruited, which last for a week or even more, day in, day out. Comrades, let's try to see the meaning of what we are doing – we are rehearsing demonstrations, not parades!

I would very much like to have my letter published. I want to know the opinion of those who will read it.

E. GADZHIYEV, Deputy Secretary of the primary Party organization, Institute of Geology, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences

Baku

ABOUT THOSE WHO HEAD INTO FIGHT

I'm deeply concerned about the destiny of perestroika and people who carry it out. The cause of the revolutionary changes in the USSR can suffer heavily if the people who speak out the truth, the champions of perestroika, will not be protected against attacks, persecutions and retaliations. Those people who like very much the older order of things, because it enabled them to lead a cushy idle life, are still in power and will stop at nothing.

A person who openly and honestly speaks up against negative sides of life and bureaucrats is under a constant threat of disgrace and criticism. This is not the way it should be. It runs counter to our principles.

Persecutions of an honest person cause a vast and irretrievable damage to our society. Involuntarily, people start to think that it is dangerous and futile to fight those in power. Few colleagues of a punished champion of truth will venture to follow his example.

Such a situation undermines the belief in perestroika and justice.

Some people wish to create the impression that perestroika has no enemies. That is not true. Perestroika is a revolution, and which of the revolutions in the history of mankind knew no enemies? The present-day enemies are real and will hold out to the end.

The duty of the entire mass media is to openly and honestly reveal who impedes our progress and how, and how the obstacles are to be got rid of. Then we will solve our problems easier. Let the people going into a battle be sure that our cause is right.

E. VOLSKY, physician

Moscow

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